



CAYUGA COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES

FIRE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EMS

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**“Federal Support for Firefighters and First Responders:
A View from Upstate New York”**
Hosted by: House Committee on Science
June 21, 2004
Auburn Fire Dept, Auburn, NY

Summary of Testimony Prepared by Pat DiNonno

Background on the responsibilities and activities in the Cayuga County Emergency Management Office:

Currently the office consists of the following full time personnel:

- Director of Emergency Services, Pat DiNonno
- Deputy Director of Emergency Management, Victoria Chamberlain
- Administrative Officer for Emergency Medical Services, Margaret Mach
- Secretary/Typist, Joy Pamplun

The following are part time personnel:

- (1)Deputy Director for Fire/Rescue Services, Ed Laraway
- (6) Deputy Fire Coordinators
- Medical Director for Emergency Medical Services
- Deputy Director for Emergency Medical Services, Roman Rotko
- (5) Deputy Emergency Medical Coordinators

The following are approximately number of contractual personnel:

- (8) EMS Certified Instructor/Coordinators
- (21) EMS Certified Laboratory Instructors
- (21) EMS Practical Work Instructors

The following are approximately number of volunteer personnel :

- (20) Auxiliary Police Officers
- (35) Amateur Radio Operators
- (25) High Angle Rescue Team Members
- (25) Fire Investigation Team Members and
- (10) Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team Members

ROLE

The mission statement for the Emergency Management Office is “to provide for life, safety, property and environment protection from all natural and manmade hazards that may occur within Cayuga County through a comprehensive and integrated emergency management planning and execution system approach”.

The role of the office is multi-faceted, but basically includes training and education of emergency services personnel and the public. It also includes coordinating preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery of all agencies and personnel to any potential or actual manmade or natural disaster that threatens life, property and/or the environment in Cayuga County. The severe weather events are: flood, drought, hurricane, tornado, winter storm, ice storm. Also, the office handles events such as hazardous material or radiological release, airplane crash, train derailment, dam failure, long term power failure, mass casualty incidents or act of domestic terrorism.

Our office routinely provides resource information and interacts with Fire, Emergency Medical, Law Enforcement, the American Red Cross, the New York State Health Department, the County Health Department, the Planning Department and the New York State Weapons of Mass Destruction Taskforce on a wide range of issues. We function as the coordinator between local and state/federal government in matters related to Federal Grant/Loan monies. We provide Emergency Medical, CPR and Fire training for all county first responders.

When a State of Emergency has been declared (whether it be a County, State, or Federal) our office becomes very active and is the key communication and contact center. When a Presidential Declaration is declared affecting Cayuga County, our office staff and coordinators provide information for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State Emergency Management office (SEMO). We provide assistance during the emergency and through the recovery operation process to individuals, municipalities, or businesses. FEMA and SEMO agency representatives are given office space and staff support from our office which allows them to service eligible entities.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL & FIRE TRAINING

We provide Emergency Medical training for all EMS responders using State Health Department Programs and Curriculum. Fire training is provided with State Fire Instructors teaching State Fire Service Courses for all fire departments.

POLICIES

The Emergency Management Office works closely and cooperatively with the Cayuga County Chapter of the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the New York State Health Department, Schools, Nursing Homes, Residential Centers (Adult Care and Day Care), County Government, the County Health Department, the County Planning Department, Towns, Villages, the City of Auburn and the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) in planning and preparedness for any potential manmade or natural disaster. In addition, this office will communicate with, support and assist these organizations in any way necessary and possible before, during and after any disaster relative to the provision and coordination of human needs.

OPERATIONS

The Emergency Management Office can activate our County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) anytime it is needed. In the event that it becomes necessary, the Cayuga County Emergency Management Office will provide supplemental and/or primary communications between the organizations and the EOC by the use of RACES personnel (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services). Further, this office will coordinate the provision of any other support services or functions as necessary.

Present your views on the legislation:

I am in complete support of the "Assistance to Firefighters Grant Reauthorization Act of 2004". This legislation has, in the past, allowed various fire departments to obtain funding for equipment, training and communications which otherwise would have not been obtained because of limited budget resources. To continue this program would guarantee those departments awarded funding under the program to provide essential services within their response area. This will assure that the department members are properly trained and equipped with the necessary safety equipment and vehicles. The addition to this legislation will include grant awards to EMS response for volunteer medical service squads as an important features which I support.

How does your office coordinate with Cayuga County Fire Departments?

The Fire Coordinator's office is an integral part of our office staffed with a Fire Coordinator and Deputy Fire Coordinator who are minimal, part time employees and compensated sparsely although they may work long hours. They are the liaison between the individual fire departments in their district and our Emergency Management Office and a point of contact for:

NYS Office of Fire Prevention and Control, OSHA/PESH, health and safety issues, State and local mutual aid, Hazardous Materials Team, Fire Investigation Team, High Angle Rescue Team, the County Fire Training Tower, Fire Advisory Board and Homeland Security.

Our office provides Fire training with State Fire Instructors who teach State Fire Service Courses for all fire departments. We provide office support and point of contact for the State Fire Instructors. In addition, we set up class schedules and provide notification to all first responders for all available classes.

The EMS Coordinator's office is another integral part of our office staffed with an EMS Coordinator and Deputy EMS Coordinator who are also minimal, part time employees. They are the liaison between the individual EMS units in their district and the Emergency Management Office. They are a resource for information and a point of contact for:

NYS Department of Health, OSHA/PESH, health and safety issues, State and local mutual aid, Hazardous Materials Team, Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM), EMS Advisory Board and Homeland Security.

In addition, the EMS Office provides all of the State Certified medical training for all EMS and employs a Medical Director who oversees the State Health Department Programs and Curriculum. The EMS office duties encompasses all aspects from hiring of instructors to sale of books, review of curriculum and purchasing and maintaining training equipment and supplies.

What issues present the greatest challenges for first responders (including police, EMS and others) in your area:

One challenge is being able to function adequately with limited personnel at emergency scenes.

Another challenge is trying to communicate with outdated radio systems that do not allow complete and adequate communication coverage between those on the scene and the 9-1-1 Communication Center.

It is a challenge to try to provide adequate training for first responders without enough financial resources.

What are the most pressing needs in terms of equipment, staffing, training, communication:

The most critical issue is manpower shortage for all responding agencies. Budgets are strained for manpower within the paid departments.

Recruitment and retention is an on-going problem within the volunteer departments. Programs need to be developed to assist in recruitment and a form of reward for volunteer services. There is a need to maintain funding for needed equipment such as personal protective equipment, rescue equipment, EMS medical equipment and new vehicle purchases is pressing.

Within the communication area, there is also a need for new inter-operable radio systems.

There is an urgent need for financial resources to complete the Fire Training Center that will include a classroom building and a propane fueled burn room. Currently the Assistance to Firefighters Grant do not allow for funding to be used in a county facility. Completing our Fire Training Center would allow all county fire departments better use of the facility.

There is a crucial financial need to send first responders for classroom training, conference and seminars and other related expenses.

What are the appropriate roles of federal, state and local governments in helping your office meet its responsibilities to protect the public:

In order to support our office, the levels of government need to know exactly what functions our office is responsible for and to support our decision and initiatives for public safety.

In what ways can the federal government, in particular the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Fire Administration, improve its support for offices like yours?

Continue fire service grant programs for individual fire departments. To improve support, we would like changes in the Homeland Security grant programs. First, we would like a realistic time frame to complete the application with training. Second, that they can be written in a user-friendly manner. This will allow for flexible decision-making and make it easier to spend the funds for what we determine is the need.

How should the federal government balance support for counter-terrorism activities with that of more traditional first responder programs?

Additional funding needs to be provided for counter-terrorist activities through Homeland Security grant programs. Traditional first responder programs are minimum training programs and need to be continually upgraded to reflect Homeland Security issues.

Personal Comments:

Located at the Cayuga Community College is the “Institute for the Application of Geospatial Technology” (IAGT) led by Chief Executive, Robert N. Brower. This Institute has is a highly sophisticated computer system that can be utilized for responder training, emergency preplanning and during actual emergency events. After the 9/11 Terrorist Attack, various Cayuga County emergency personnel were utilized by the IAGT to aid New York City Emergency Responders in their recovery efforts. I highly recommend promotion of this organization as stated above.

I would support additional legislation that would allow funding grants for county owned training facilities.